route was signed between the three countries aimed at improving access to Afghanistan, and upgrading the infrastructure at Chabahar port and relevant road segments.

Indo-US talks on Missile Defence Plan

248. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether US Principal Deputy Secretary of Defence held talks with senior officials of his Ministry and informed about U.S. Missile Defence Plans in New Delhi in January, 2003;

(b) if so, whether U.S. has held such talks with other countries also;

(c) if so, the names of the countries; and

(d) India's response in this talk?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b, and (c) U.S. has held talks with its allies as well as Russia and China on the question of missile defence.

(d) The talks in New Delhi focussed on missile defence issues, contribution of missile defence to security and stability, and the latest developments in U.S. missile defence policies and programmes. Both sides agreed to further continue such exchanges.

Visit of Iranian President

249. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:
SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether President of Iran visited India during the last week of January;

(b) if so, the subjects discussed during his visit and the details of the agreements reached between the two countries; and

(c) whether any follow-up action has initiated on any of these matters?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes. President of Iran H.E. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami visited India from 24 to 28 January, 2003.

(b) and (c) During the visit, wide ranging discussions on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest were held. The New Delhi Declaration, signed by the Prime Minister and the Iranian President, puts forth the vision of strategic partnership between India and Iran for a more stable, secure and prosperous region and for enhanced regional and global cooperation. It touches all aspects of cooperation-bilateral economic cooperation, cooperation in the field of hydrocarbons, science and technology, information technology, education and training, reconstruction of Afghanistan, international terrorism, and other global issues.

In addition to the New Delhi Declaration a Memorandum of Understanding on the Road Map to Strategic Cooperation was also signed which sets a five-year target oriented framework for milestones towards the strategic partnership. Six other documents: Agreement on Science and Technology cooperation; MoUs on Cooperation in hydrocarbons sector, Vocational Training, and Urban Water Management; Cultural Exchange Programme (2003-2005); and Framework Agreement on operationalization of USD 200 million Indian line of credit to be implemented by Exim Bank through a group of Iranian banks, were also signed. Subsequently, Home Secretary had visited Iran from 9 to 12 February, 2003 to pursue cooperation, *inter alia*, on issues related to counter-terrorism and prevention of drug trafficking.

America's preparation for war against Iraq

250. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the developments culminating in U.S.'s preparations for war against Iraq; and

(b) if so, what steps have been taken by Government to dissuade the U.S. from taking the extreme step and for dispensing of the war-clouds?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes. Government is monitoring all developments in the evolving situation with regard to Iraq.